

THE VILLAGE SETTING

512 almost deserted, except for women going on visits or on business and young children noisily engaged in their games. By sunset the roads leading to the village become busy and crowded with villagers and cattle returning home, who in their hurried endeavour to get their evening meal raise the dense cloud of dust that characterizes the agricultural roads and the village streets during this hour. Some time later, the village witnesses the general exodus of women and girls from the village towards the Nile to fill their water jars, while the men sprawl outside the houses or cluster round a wood-fire in the guest house on cold nights to exchange news, smoke their tobacco and engage in gossip.

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101 In portraying some of the features of the rustic setting and life in Silwa, a question emerges: to what extent is this village under study typical of the rural conditions in Egypt? To such a question an objective answer is almost impossible, considering the fact that there are five thousand large villages and twenty thousand hamlets (izbahs) in Egypt. The writer can only claim with confidence that Silwa is typical of the majority of villages in the province of Aswan. There are certainly differences from one province to another, with regard to the degree of urbanization, the infiltration of agencies of social change such as schools, means of communication, newspapers and radio. On the whole, Aswan, being the farthest province from the metropolis, could be considered relatively the least affected by such factors. It is also known as one of the poorest provinces, as the Nile Valley reaches its narrowest stretch in the south (with the exception of the district of Kom Ombo). Moreover, Silwa, as will be seen later, is composed mainly of small landowners. There are many other villages throughout Egypt where the inhabitants are mainly tenants or part-owners and part-tenants, while many others work as hired labour.¹ With the exception of Kom Ombo, the majority of the land in Aswan produces subsistence crops, while in other provinces cash crops such as cotton and sugar-cane may be the main agricultural crop.

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184 At this juncture it is important to point out one of the striking differences between most of the provinces of Upper Egypt down to Beni Suef and the other provinces, especially in the Delta. This is while women in the former provinces go about veiled and do not actually work on the fields, those in the latter are neither veiled nor debarred from active work on the farm. The writer cannot satisfactorily account for such a difference and knows of no source that has tackled this question. Is it merely a result of some historical or racial difference between the two parts of the country? Has it some connection with cotton culture and the perennial irrigation which are mainly predominant in the North?² Is it an expression of some

¹ See A. Ammar, op. cit.

² The cultivation of cotton requires not only a dense population, but one with a birth rate above the average. Charles Issawi, *Egypt—An Economic and Social Analysis*, London, 1947. In the light of this, female labour was perhaps essential for the economic activities in those provinces.

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major cultural variation between these regions? Or is it a combination of these factors? At present the writer finds himself unable to settle such an issue. 582

In conclusion, it is extremely difficult to show the extent to which Silwa is a typical Egyptian village. All that can be claimed is that Silwa at least represents one of the village types prevailing in Upper Egypt. It also reflects in its community life some of the national problems of population pressure, of agricultural economy, malnutrition, and slow rate of accepting government-sponsored programmes as evidenced by instances of resistance and evasion which will be discussed later. 369

If, however, no single concrete statement about Silwa applies to other villages in Upper Egypt, the writer can tentatively assume that through the diversity of details there runs a common outlook and ethos of life and that very few differences obtain with regard to the cultural values and the aims and methods of socialization.¹

Silwa, however, was not primarily chosen for a field-work investigation for its 'typicalness' or otherwise, and the writer must admit that 'the prime mover' for this selection was his personal connection with the village. In it he was born and brought up till the age of seven, when he left to receive his primary-school education in Aswan, his secondary education in Sohaj, province of Jirja, and his university course in Cairo. Throughout his life he has never severed his contacts with his birthplace as he used to stay there during summer holidays and the short-term vacations. The writer lived in close emotional, spiritual and intellectual touch with the villagers, a position which has its merits and demerits for such a study. 121 [123]

The choice of such a village was also appropriate as it presents a convenient starting point for a first study of this kind, as the village is relatively isolated and homogeneous where the traditional culture is presumably better preserved than others in more contact with city life. With fewer social sub-divisions, with no complexity of social classes, of differential functions and of division of labour, and with the dominance of universals and a minimum of alternatives and specialities in social behaviour, such a community is more amenable to study for a single investigator.² [184]

With no problem of learning the language or even the dialect, the six months of field work were fairly adequate to carry out such an investigation.

¹ For the substantiation or modification of such a statement, research in other Provinces has to be considered. The gap in such studies has been felt by many scholars. 'The Near and Middle East can show practically no contributions to these studies.' Margaret Read, *Education and Cultural Tradition*, London, 1951, p. 20. 'No Moslem writer, in either medieval or modern times, has condescended to describe the organization of village life in his country.' H. A. R. Gibb and Harold Bowen, *Islamic Society and the West*, Vol. I, Part 1, London, 1950, p. 5.

² The terms 'universals, alternatives and specialities' have been introduced by R. Linton and are used here in the same way. See his book *The Study of Man*, New York, 1946, pp. 272-4. R. Firth refers to the value of concentrated observation of small-unit behaviour, a type of study for which he suggests the term micro-sociology, in *Elements of Social Organization*, London, 1951.

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small landholders. Three decades ago, the head of one family owned about thirty acres, but after his death the land was divided into smaller plots between his inheritors. At present, apart from two outside landowners who possess about sixty acres in the village, and ten other villagers who each own more than five feddans, all the rest own less than five feddans. If the total arable land, estimated at 1350 acres, were distributed among the total population of 4450 people approximately, the *per capita* share would be little less than third of an acre (seven kirats) or 0.58 crop area *per capita*, which is slightly higher than the crop area *per capita* for the whole country, i.e. 0.46.¹ Moreover, the soil of the cultivable land in the village represents the average soil in the country, judging by its taxable power, which ranges from eighty to a hundred piastres.

At this juncture, it is relevant to mention that according to the Koranic law, at the death of man or woman, his or her property is shared by all the children of the deceased. We cannot go into the various details of the intricate Moslem law of inheritance, but shall refer to some of its significant principles. A female gets a share half that of the male. The inheritance should always be awarded to the 'asaba, the patrilineal line, however distant its members may be (apart from the wife, if she lives after her husband). The law recognizes the equivalence of siblings of the same sex, and it gives no privileges to primogeniture.

During the father's life, his children, whatever their age or status, have no legal right to own any of his property.² Whether to divide the land each attending to his share independently, or to keep it intact and farm it co-operatively, depends on the relationship between the heirs.³ Many factors are involved, such as the existence of half-siblings (brothers or sisters by the father only), where the possibility of division is very great, on the relations of wives and in-laws, on the father's treatment of his children while alive, and so forth. If the land as the symbol of family unity is tilled co-operatively, the married sisters then get their land produce.

¹ The 'crop area' unit is used instead of the acre because of the existence of the two systems of irrigation in various parts of the country, and hence the crop area gives a more accurate estimate of the cultivable land. For the whole country it is calculated that the land yields an average of a crop and a half per acre. For the whole country the population is 19,090,000, the cultivated area per acres, 5,385,300, and crop area 8,815,900 (Census 1947).

² See S. G. Fitzgerald, *Muhammadan Law*, London, 1931.

³ The fear of division and perhaps the forgetting of one's name in the family has led some of the landowners to consecrate land, for all the members of his family of the patrilineal descent, which could not be owned separately, and should pass, as left, intact to the second generation and the third and so on. This type of land is called 'Wakf Ahli—family endowment', to differentiate it from Wakf Khairi—charitable endowment, consecrated for religious purposes and looked after by the Ministry of Charitable Endowments. The abuses in running these estates led the new regime that followed the abdication of ex-King Farouk to pass a law dissolving the charitable endowments (September 1952). According to this law these estates are to be distributed among the legal heirs as specified by the Islamic law of inheritance.

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older sibling, he is expected to do so, and take his turn. So practically every grown-up member of the family goes through almost the same farming stages and hence there is no specialization in any particular farm task. Friction sometimes occurs between brothers, because of gaps in this process of training, as in the case of a brother who has been working in town at an early age returning to the village to work with his family. He would resent, for instance, fetching the fertilizer from the hill, while his older brother might expect him to take over this task. In the same way, boys who had been sent by their fathers to the Kuttab to memorize the Koran till the age of fourteen or fifteen would find it difficult to adapt themselves to the cycles of agricultural work. In a few cases the performing of the appropriate tasks according to age and ability has led fathers to give each of their married sons a separate piece of land to cultivate for himself, as if they were leasing the land, the father getting one-third of the crop.

In spite of the fact that between the ages of five and twelve there is a certain amount of overlapping in the tasks of both boys and girls in the home, yet the sexual dichotomy in work is definitely established about the age of twelve. Even at an earlier stage, when the girl takes the food to the field or takes a basketful of grass to the sheep, she is only allowed to remain at the edge of it by the canal. If she ever entertains the idea of touching the implements or playing with the water, her father or brothers immediately shout at her 'Leave it! Get off the land or away from the water!' After the age of thirteen, the girls' errands are confined to the neighbourhood and they work more inside the dwelling. They are encouraged to go out for water-fetching only after sunset, when all men have returned home from work. The agricultural road leading from the village to the Nile is monopolized at night, specially on moonlit nights, by adolescent girls and women going to the Nile to fill their water-jars.

In discussing the productive activities in the village, the incentives for work must be mentioned. It is hardly necessary to stress the fact that the drive for food, and for sufficient supply of it, is one of the basic motives for work. With the small landholdings there is hardly any other alternative but to grow crops which yield the major substance of their food consumption, bread, whether wheat, barley or millet, constituting the bulk of food intake in any meal. It is believed that bread made out of home-grown crops is more lasting and sufficing than that made out of seeds bought at the market, as there is more 'baraka'—holiness and sufficiency—in the former kind. Even those few farmers with comparatively large-sized farms who have recently taken up the cultivation of cash crops like cotton and sugar-cane, still reserve the major part of their land for corn. Security of food supply depends on growing seeds as the only way of subsistence. 'From where are you going to eat?' is a question invariably asked by the villagers of any of them who entertains the idea of growing cotton on his small farm.

As it is, the various crops have different security and prestige values

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girls, on the whole, getting less than the boys. Young girls may eat at their father's table, but after the age of twelve, sex dichotomy is established in food, and the female members of the family eat afterwards.

The meal usually starts with the invocation, 'In the name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful', and ends by every participant's saying 'Praise to God'. The father, as the disciplinarian, watches to see if any child shows signs of greed or wasting food by dropping it, whereupon he has to ask him to control himself, saying, 'Oh boy! Why don't you say in the name of God?' If the child continues to be careless or rude, he might be hit or given less share of the meat or his share might be given to one of his more disciplined brothers. Generally speaking, children are expected to be silent and obedient at meals. A child's complaint about food is not tolerated as such a complaint removes 'baraka'.

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The end of more pretentious meals, especially on festival occasions, always witnesses the family's remembrance of its deceased members, when the father asks all the members present to recite the 'Fatiha' from the Koran for the souls of the dead. The eve of the two religious feasts Ramadan and Adha is called Rahamat—mercy, where practically every family prepares a good meal at the end of which they ask God to have mercy on their deceased. On the morning of the feast-days, the women-folk make special wheat bread, which they take to eat or distribute among children or whoever is present at the cemetery, asking them to read the Fatiha for their dead.

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Hospitality is shown by offering an excessive amount of food. In case of guests, the table or tray is arranged with loaves of bread all round, no gaps being left. The guests should be made to feel that there is an abundance of food and 'ghamoos', and should be encouraged all the time to eat by saying, 'Go ahead; do your best; try more of this', and so on. The etiquette of hospitality is that while the guest must show a kind of restraint, the host must be always persuading him to carry on. The host must also apologize for not being able to provide the right quantity and quality of food for the occasion, saying, 'May our affection cover up the deficiency in the meal'.

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There is no doubt that the partaking of food is one of the main forces bringing about or reinforcing relationship between members of this community and between them and other neighbouring villages. 'There is bread and salt between us' is a strong binding moral force between two people or two families, and to betray bread and salt is almost a sin, which is punishable either in this world or in the next. The commensalism of the clan-meals in the breaking of the daily fast during the whole month of Ramadan, breakfast on the mornings of the two feasts and on funeral days is a reminder of, and contributor to, group solidarity. Boys who carry their fathers' trays of food are usually exchanged, and sent to eat at another man's tray.

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At the beginning of the fresh harvest, a special meal is provided by

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613 during the month of Ramadan, when families co-operate in providing the
574 'Koran reciter' as well as other guests with tea and food.

613 Identification with the clan sentiment shows itself in cases of murder,
682 where the clans of both the murderer and the murdered are involved. It is
621 the obligation of the father, son, brother, uncle or paternal cousin to call
for vengeance and for the clan to support him, either by claiming compensation (which, however, is seldom accepted if the claim is acknowledged) or by counter-murder, as the Koran ordains that murder should be punished with murder. The two clans through the mediation of another clan have to settle the dispute by deciding the compensation, called 'dia'.

[779] This is no Durkheimian merging of the individual into the group. It is
156 simply a statement of the compelling moral law that the individual, to be in line with the group, should express group-sympathy; if the group is angry, he should be angry, if it is insulted, he must feel that he is insulted.

182 This pattern of social structure does not apply merely to the Silwa community and the G'afra, but applies in varying degrees to the whole province of Aswan, and many other provinces that are known to the writer in Upper Egypt. In all this, the bond of common descent and family connections is one of the strongest factors as well as the most socially effective force in the social structure.

561 The village could also be classified into social groups on the basis of age. From the standpoint of age there are three broad social groupings. The first is referred to as 'youngsters' (jahhal), including all boys and girls up to the age of twelve or thirteen years. The second is the unmarried group (fityan), and the third is represented by the married adults, referred to as 'men or women'.

[291] In public there is no free mixing between these three categories as it is considered 'impolite' for a youngster to sit with men, for example, and the converse would be shameful. Youngsters can only be seen in an adult gathering serving tea, or holding the ablution laver and ewer, or as messengers. In the case of young boys, they are marked by their head cap, while unmarried boys wear a turban, and the men besides a turban wear a 'tob' which is a black outer garment, and usually carry a stick or a staff.

561 Apart from segregation and dress, the age criterion shows itself in outward behaviour, by considering the older people as equivalent to the
888 paternal uncle, or as fathers, or grandfathers if they are very old. Often older people are addressed by the kinship term 'Ammy' (O my paternal uncle), especially if one wants to be 'polite'. If one does not use the kinship term one has to address the older person by the title 'Sheikh' preceding his first name.

562 Sex is another criterion for two definite social groups: the world of men, and the world of women. In this community it is unthinkable to have free mixing between the two worlds, or that a thing done by one sex can also be done by a member of the other sex. Men have their scope of activities either in the fields or outside the compound, the women are mainly con-

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fined to their homes. A man who does not frequently mix with his fellow men outside the house is branded as the 'man of the town' while a woman who continually leaves her house is called 'strayer'. Men meet for their spontaneous gathering and gossip outside the house, while women meet inside. While women are expected to adorn themselves with earrings, nose rings, kohl for the eyes, finger rings, anklets, henna for the palms (almost an ornament for every sense), men are supposed to refrain. Moreover: while men shave or cut their hair, women leave it to grow as long as possible and never cut it.¹ While men wear pants, women do not: while women's speech is usually sprinkled with words in the diminutive, men are not expected to follow this habit; while women carry things on their heads, men never do so, and only carry things either in the hands, or on the back or shoulders. On walking along the village streets and alleyways, women keep near the wall, while men walk in the middle of the street. Although both men and women are fond of dramatizing their speech, yet they have different stylized ways of doing this. While men use their index fingers as a sign of threatening, women point out with their middle finger. Women grasp their chin or slap their face with open palms for surprise or regret or shame, while men slowly clap their hands. On being angry or hurt, the woman's cry is 'Abouh, abouh...' and in joy her shrill cry is 'Wri, ri, ri...'. Men are not supposed to utter any cries of joy or anger. In threatening a man will threaten in default to cut off his moustache, while a woman threatens to cut off her head hair. Men and women use different invectives and imprecations as well as different greetings. Women in their speech draw out their words, whereas men end them abruptly. Women do not participate either in individual or communal worship in the mosque as they are excluded altogether from it, but there is no Koranic support for this. On the other hand, they are usually the performers of magico-religious rituals connected with averting the evil eye, bringing about pregnancy, or healing the sick; and men are less engaged in this sphere. It is also interesting to note that, as in Classical Arabic, the dialect of the village attached the feminine 'n' at the end of the verb in the third person feminine plural, a feature which does not occur in most of the urban dialects in Egypt.

Between men and women there is complete avoidance in looking at each other face to face, except in the case of certain kinships specified by the Koran. On meeting men in the street, women have always to turn their heads to one side, and pull their head covering across their face, and men are expected to lower their heads and not stare at women. The sex taboo on looking and talking without reserve does not apply to children till they reach the adolescent stage, when they gradually acquire such norms and begin to observe them as a part of their value system of politeness. On the other hand, very old women and men are freed from such restric-

¹ See Appendix VIII, for a boy who said that he would be ashamed if his hair grew long, presumably because it looks like that of girls.

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with food consumption. There is no wife in the village who does not pursue this type of activity, as it is great disgrace not to be able to let blood flow even from a chicken if a guest comes to visit her husband, or at least provide her husband or children with a 'meat dish' on festival occasions. She should also raise goats and sheep, so that in case of death in the house an 'agira'—slain animal—can be always available at the funeral. 593
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Between husband and wife no levity of behaviour is permissible, and no obvious physical intimacy of any sort in public or in front of the children. In fact, the husband's contacts with the house are very few. It is quite common to find a child who has been asked by his mother to call father from a meeting outside saying, 'O father, they say come and speak'. This is usually a call indicating that food is ready but neither the word food nor the word mother are ever supposed to be uttered in public. The father normally quits the house immediately he finishes his meal. [95]
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During the first year of marriage the wife does not eat with her husband, partly because he is in the matrilocal residence, and partly because the wife has not yet become the mother of the children. Only then can she eat with him, but she should never confess that she has eaten before he has, for her eating afterwards is the proper procedure.

From the standpoint of sentiment, the in-law relationship is a strong and binding force, involving exchange of gifts, food and visits similar in many ways to the kinship (lineage) obligations. It is said that the wife's mother is normally very affectionate, and always fussing over her son-in-law, especially when he is in his matrilocal residence, and this attitude is usually a source of complaint and jealousy on the part of the brothers and sisters of the bride. Yet the husband's mother is traditionally harsh, difficult and fault-finding. My informant, Ali, explains the difference of the sentiment of the two mothers-in-law by saying: 'The wife's mother is all too glad to procure a husband for her daughter, and she is grateful to him for marrying her daughter; thus she favours him. The husband's mother is resentful of the fact that her son's attachment, which was solely hers before marriage, is shared with his wife.' 606

It is also significant that the wife never refers to, or addresses her husband by his first name, especially in public. She either refers to him as 'Son of so and so' (his father), or 'my man', or less commonly 'my husband'. She addresses him by saying 'O man'; and the same applies to her husband who refers to his wife as 'my woman' or 'people of the house' and addresses her by saying 'O girl'.¹ 593
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¹ Concerning the absence of any demonstration of tender feeling between wife and husband, Westermarck writes, 'It is considered indecent of a man to show any affection for his wife, and it would consequently be improper to speak of it in proverbs'. He further maintains that such an absence does not mean that no such feeling exists but has to be understood in relation to the Moorish ideas of decency. *Wit and Wisdom in Morocco*, London, 1930, p. 32.

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good as the village reciter, this being justified on the grounds that the 'village girl is always one-eyed'. Introduction of cash crops like sugar-cane and cotton has caught on for the same reasons as landlords who can afford to live in the city grow such crops. Emulation of city standards for social prestige is obvious in the example of those few people who white-washed their houses mainly on the outside but seldom inside, in contrast to the dark grey colour of mud, the ordinary house coating. The same whitewash with inscriptions from the Koran concerning pilgrimage, crude paintings of camels, and mahmal procession also form the outside decoration of the houses of pilgrims made immediately after their return from Mecca.

While some articles of men's wear or some parts of their speech have been affected by city ways, women's dress and language have hardly been affected at all. This is partly due to their relative restriction of movement and travel compared with men. On some occasion, there was a commotion in the village concerning the spread of city headgear among the women. This led to their nightly itinerary to fill their jars from the Nile being stopped for a while, as the men complained that women made it an occasion for displaying their colourful headgear.

The villagers appreciate the fact that city dwellers are much more inclined to mind their own business and engage in no gossip. Their attitude towards gossip is, however, paradoxical. It is considered sinful to talk about somebody behind his back; the Koran condemns it, and the Prophetic Tradition warns against it as 'gossip eats up the good deeds as the fire eats up wood'. Much of the village preacher's advice in the Friday sermon is on the avoidance of gossip and the use of the human tongue which could be like the scorpion's tail. Yet on the other hand, the villagers in their formal and informal gatherings occupy themselves with talking about the doings, the problems, the quarrels, and the general business of other people. They will tell you that they are engaged in just having a mouthful of words, or just chewing the cud. It is well known that gossip is almost an institution in rural areas, partly informative, partly interpretive, and on the whole functions as a means of social control and a medium for the formation of public opinion. In this connection, my informant Ali told me that townspeople have more scope for piety, as the occasions for gossip do not arise as among the people of Silwa.

One of the main things that a small number of enlightened villagers are aware of is the fact that in the cities people can find more religious enlightenment as to what are the principles of pure religion in distinction from religion mixed with pre-Islamic customs (Jahilyia), which they think are prevalent in the village. On enquiring about examples of the supremacy of the chances of the city dwellers over the villagers in this respect, most of the information elicited concerned religious ritual. Ali, as well as other persons, stated that city people know how to perform their ablutions better, how to say their prayers in a more acceptable way, and have no mourning

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[783] pride in the number of my followers in comparison with those of other nations". If sons and daughters behave uprightly they will act as a means of redeeming the parents' sin. Any good action by the child, e.g. giving alms, helping the weak, digging a well, would also benefit the parents. Parents who have left unworthy children have left "dust" behind.'

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779 My informant went on to say: 'Children are the glory of this world, as the Koran says "Money and children are the joy of this life". Another statement of the Koran says: "God give us a good thing in this world and a good thing in the next world". The Koran interpreters consider that, in this context, "the good thing of this world" implies children. Children are also referred to as sowing seeds, as it is through these seeds that the corn reproduces itself.'

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[595] As for the wife, she attains her proper status only as a mother, and a childless woman is in an insecure position, as her husband is socially justified in remarrying, to have children. For a newly-married couple to have a child is a step towards partaking of some individuality in the larger family circle. The wife is referred to as 'mother of the children' and whenever a man is asked about his wife, she is frequently referred to also as the 'mother of the first-born boy' and the same applies also to the father, and this reference is more common in public gatherings.

842 My informant, Mahmoud, told me that there were ten childless women in the village and that they were therefore known by everybody. Out of these ten, two were living with husbands who had taken a second wife. He continued, 'A childless woman is usually like a she-camel who does not conceive, puts on more and more flesh, and gets younger every day—but not fruitful, as she can never "lengthen" her husband's neck amongst the menfolk. She is a sore eye to her family. The proper woman is the one who is an "envelope for conception".' It is not strange, then, that a fat woman is a desirable ideal, as she has more room to bear the child, lactates abundantly and gives more warmth to her children.

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[737] It is appropriate here to discuss the differential value of boys and girls in Silwa. The importance of the boys' work in the fields as a major contribution to the family's means of subsistence was discussed earlier. Moreover, the boys are considered to be the best capital investment for ageing parents. They are expected to form the basis for social and economic security, not only for their parents, but also for any widowed sisters. This duty to support their parents or those female relatives who have no other man to support them is legally enforced by the religious courts. This question gives rise to endless disputes; one hears of parents suing their children for support according to their means, or at least threatening to sue them. No such obligations devolve on the daughters, as they are wives of their husbands, and no claim can be made against them.

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562 Boys are also an added qualification for social prestige. A man with more sons backing him up can always speak with more authority and ranks high in the community's esteem even if he owns less land. Fathers who have

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seven sons or more are always held up as a model and an enviable ideal, and one of the most favourable prayers to any man is to wish him 'seven sons and to perform seven pilgrimages'. 554
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The greater status deriving from having boys shows itself in the difference of presents given to the midwife on the birth of a boy compared with those on the birth of a girl. The announcer of the birth of a boy to the father would ask him for a present, and would warmly congratulate him, wishing him to have a brother for example for the boy if he is the first one, or to complete the seven. In the case of a girl, the father is usually teased by telling him: 'May she never sneeze.' The saying is that 'a boy is a joy even if he is stillborn'. Another saying runs, 'A boy who dies is better than seven girls'. It is also interesting to notice that fathers and mothers swear 'by the neck' of their boys, and not girls (by their lives), as one of the most effective and binding oaths. Girls jeer at their playmates who have no brothers, and swear by the life of their own brothers. [844]
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The fear of having a daughter is mainly connected with the sense of 'shame' which a girl might bring to her family, especially before her marriage. It is the responsibility of the male line of her family to arrange her marriage, and clothe and feed her if she is not married. If any disgraceful rumour about a girl or a woman spreads in the village it is the father as well as the husband who has to discipline the girl or bear the social stigma. Girls at a very early stage, on seeing a moth hovering round the fire, are taught to repeat 'Fire is preferable to shame'. It is also said that a girl is brought up only to be taken away by a man (when she is married) and this means a loss to the family. [782]

Yet the value of the girls is often justified and rationalized by other arguments. On being told of the birth of a girl, a father would say, 'She is God's creation; and who knows where the blessedness lies?' A girl is always referred to in this context of the evaluation of the two sexes as 'the one who will usher her parents into the shade' (i.e. coolness) when they get old, as the girl is considered more compassionate than the boy. My informant, Mahmoud, told me that 'visiting one's daughter is usually an occasion for having either a pot of tea or some food; she can never let her father leave her husband's house without "wetting his throat".' Mothers are very keen on having daughters to help them in domestic work, by sending them on errands to neighbours' homes. [584]

One of the folk songs refers to the daughter as 'appointing her father as the sole arbiter in a gathering'—which is her engagement gathering when the father fixes the bride-price 'which is the daughter's weight of gold and silver'. The song goes on to say that through the daughter 'the father stretches his roots to feed other places' and thus the girl provides a means of extending kinship relations through her marriage. What the song does not explicitly say is that a girl is no financial strain on her parents as they do not provide any marriage payment for her, and hence her marriage is not a burden on the family as with the boy. 562
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BIRTH, INFANCY AND EARLY TRAINING

● 562 It is almost a sin (makrôuh) to evince any dissatisfaction on having girls.
842 One is usually reminded of the burying alive of girls in the pre-Islamic days, and how a Moslem should not behave likewise. In this connection, my informant, Ali, recited from the Koran. He continued to say that a father of so many girls is generously rewarded in the next world as he is sacrificing for them without any return. In fact, he continued, some people who have many girls are living quite well-off. They are living 'on their girls' wealth appropriated to them by God'.¹

844 The events of pregnancy and birth occasion the exchange of many
843 social obligations amongst the womenfolk. Apart from actual help and
431 advice of relatives during pregnancy or at birth, the birth of the child
602 marks the occasion for sending gifts and making visits (zwarat). Immediately a woman completes her forty days of confinement, she starts with her mother or older daughter, checking on who has sent her presents and who has not, and from whom she is expecting to receive later. The failure to conform to the expectations or the fulfilment of mutual 'visitings', or to give the proper help at the right time would expose the people concerned to great blame, fuss and gossip. 'She has not come to give me a hand or paid me a "visiting" during the forty days or when I was "craving"', is a plausible justification for a woman not to be on 'talking terms' with another woman.

602 Amongst women folk, pregnancy and birth are occasions highly charged with the rendering of social obligations and of drawing up the balance-sheet, as it were, of reciprocal obligations. Even blood relationship cannot override the emotional tension which occurs as a failure to meet the social demands. On the contrary, it accentuates it, and on such occasions one sees 'the pull and push' of kinship ties. While the fulfilment of social demands works for the cohesion and solidarity of the group, it carries with it the seeds of friction and misunderstandings.

843 It is to be noticed that the events attending pregnancy and birth, and most of what concerns them, are almost purely within the female purview. Men have little or nothing to do with them, not even in calling in the midwife. It is almost a taboo for a man to mention to his fellows that his wife is pregnant, and it is a topic avoided by men. It is very significant in this respect that the husband whose wife is in childbirth must absent himself from the house, and, if the delivery is at night, he has to sleep outside the house, either in a relative's house or in the guest house.

844 Enquiring as to whether there were any variations in the procedure of pregnancy and birth, my female informant told me that 'they happen in every family without exception or modification'. No woman in the village has been to a doctor or hospital for her delivery. She added: 'It is always better to die at home', a phrase which is usually said as a defence against going away for an uncertain project. It is also believed that one would

¹ For a discussion on the differential value of boys and girls, see also H. Granqvist, *Child Problems among the Arabs*.

BIRTH, INFANCY AND EARLY TRAINING

be more attached to his home if his head has first 'fallen into it' at birth 844
(masqat ar-ras).

There is no policy of any kind for limiting birth, either by spacing it 842
out or by practising birth control. Birth control in the modern sense is
unheard of, and in any case it is considered as a religious sin, and deemed
an interference with God's creation.¹ A part of the married male ethos is 831
not to regulate his sex desires, but to give them full play whenever the
need arises. Continence is not a desirable thing for a married man, but to
have sexual intercourse with his wife is a good religious deed (hasana).
One should not counteract sexual desires but rather stimulate them, and 832
hence the various devices such as special food and aphrodisiacs like
hasheesh and opium are resorted to for sexual potency. The writer heard 842
of no woman who has practised any devices to confer sterility on her.

The period of the 'forty days' is enshrouded in a great deal of secrecy 846
and psychological delicacy. For fear of the evil eye, the influence of the 854
evil spirits, or sterility, the mother should adhere to the rigid system of
food, minimum movement and general seclusion and other taboos. This
is the period in which another woman who wants to become pregnant
might suddenly 'press' on her, and thus she could be hampered or delayed
in her next pregnancy. However, when a visitor comes to the house the
mother covers herself as well as the child and pretends to be feeling rather
uncomfortable, either groaning or suffering from pain. In referring to the
baby, visitors must be careful not to praise it openly, unless they use 848
the safeguarding phrases such as 'God preserve him' (or her), 'may
the Prophet's blessings be upon him'. On enquiring about the sex of a
child, if it is a boy, his sex is usually hidden at first to be declared
afterwards.

Concerning the child itself, one observes that it is announced and intro- 851
duced in various ways. In the case of a boy, a 'gong' is produced in his
room every morning and every evening; the purpose, as it is believed, is
to make the child brave and not to fear any unexpected shock. Yet the
reaction of the neighbours on hearing the sound is one of recognition that
'the so-and-so's are sounding for their child'.

The naming ceremony in the case of a boy is the second link in the 553
chain of introducing the child to his neighbours and relatives. Actually 851
the name is usually agreed upon before birth, though the ceremony is the
formal occasion for declaring the name. Women have no formal congrega-
tion like the men, but a small portion of food and meat is sent to the homes
of the female relatives. It is to be stressed that very few people have a
naming ceremony for the girls, which is also a male gathering. The motive 563
behind the girls' ceremony could be regarded as a kind of religious
puritanism to counteract the pre-Islamic sin of burying the girls alive.

¹ A scholar of al-Azhar told the writer that the Grand Mufti of Egypt recently issued
a 'fatwa' permitting the use of contraceptives and sanctioning abortion before the fourth
month, that is 'before the child is gifted with a soul'.

BIRTH, INFANCY AND EARLY TRAINING

not only during the first forty days but which is also sustained till the arrival of the next baby. According to the family structure in the village, there are invariably at least two grown-up women attending to the rearing of the child, or sharing in the child's care, e.g. maternal grandmother, paternal grandmother, sisters, paternal or maternal aunts, or brothers' wives. As the newly born baby, or even any child, has no special cradle, cot, or bed, it always sleeps beside the mother or sits on her lap. After the forty days it may be picked up by relatives. 854

During the third and fourth month, the child is usually held horizontally with the mother's hands underneath its legs and head. During the fourth month it is held vertically, supported under the arms, and can be carried against the mother's breast, being supported with her hands under the buttocks. During the fifth month, he is normally held astride the mother's hip.

Nursing is one of the first basic needs of the child which in this community conforms to no schedule. It is guided only by two principles. The first is that the child is given the breast whenever it cries. The second is that it is suckled when the breast becomes 'compassionate', in other words when the mother's breast becomes full. It is said that when there is 'compassion' in the breast the child is hungry, and therefore the mother must offer it to her baby. The reciprocity between the baby's need and the breast is recognized to be one of the determining factors in suckling. It is true that in Silwa, as in Artas, the mother's breast is the symbol of compassion.¹ Nothing is more binding in the mother-child relationship than the memories of 'stomach enveloping' and 'breast-feeding' which are symbols invoked by mothers to remind their sons or daughters to be obedient, or to come to their help in old age. 'I enveloped you for nine months and have fed you with my breast' is supposed to be one of the most effective and compelling entreaties. In this connection, Ali related the story of the Caliph Harun al Rashid and Gafar al Barmaki, his vizier, whom the former decided to kill, and imprison or disperse the rest of his family, after he feared that they were plotting to remove him from the Caliphate. Harun carried out his decisions in spite of the entreating of Gafar's mother, who had breast-fed the Caliph and who had implored him by the milk she gave him, and the locks of his hair she had cut off and kept with her. 'This is', remarked Ali, 'an example of tyranny that overrides one's duties towards his breast-feeder who is like a mother.' 853

It is because women can provide their babies with milk that they are considered to be endowed with compassion. This is one of the tangible arguments for the value of having girls, who would be a source of compassion not only for their children, but also for their parents. [892] [52]

The time and frequency of suckling varies from day to day and from child to child. A child who often cries is regarded as a weakling and hence its need for more suckling. A mother of a four-month-old child, who was

¹ H. Grainger, *Birth and Childhood among the Arabs*, p. 107.

THE AIMS AND METHODS OF SOCIALIZATION IN SILWA

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[858] father or his elder brother (or mother or elder sister) those tasks which he or she is capable of doing. The child must work for his family as a necessary requisite to enjoying their protection. This is made explicit to children by parents who, on seeing their negligent children enjoying their food, would rebuke them by saying, 'Yes, you only know how to eat and drink', or 'You know how to increase the size of your buttocks'. There is nothing to add here concerning technical training, and further reference will be made in connection with its relation to cultural training. The lack of mastery in skills required from boys at a particular age is attributed to inefficient training by the parents. Once in the fields I heard a father blaming his son for his inability to get the right fodder for the cow by saying, 'The fault is not yours; it is the fault of him who has brought you up'.

867 The process of growing up is envisaged as a way of disciplining the child to conform to the adults' standards, and to comply with what their elders expect them to do, thus acquiring the qualities of being polite—'muaddab'. In adult eyes, the period of childhood is a nuisance, and childhood activities, especially play, are a waste of time. The 'giving of adab' to children is the guarantee of the survival of the social structure, with its patrilineal bias and respect relationships, especially filial piety, which is sanctioned by the Koranic injunctions. To become 'muaddab' is the ideal set up by parents for their children, and the adherence to which is constantly impressed upon them. The ideal, although emphasizing subservience and obedience of the children to their parents, is actually extended to include the whole range of children's activities for which their elders are responsible. The adult sense of keenness to bring their children to realize this ideal can be traced in parents' prayers that God might not make their children disobedient or cause them shame. One of the most effective insults to a boy or a girl is the provoking remark that he or she has no people to discipline him or her. 'She is a divorced girl' or 'unrestrained'; or for a boy, 'he is a pushing boy' (literally 'ascending'). Such comments are addressed to young persons who show no respect to people of their parents' age or who transgress the limits of behaviour expected from their age or sex group, e.g. a boy walking through a gathering of men, a married man insulting his father, a girl shouting from the roof of the house while fetching fuel, or a girl caught entering the guest house.¹

The acquiring of the procedures of 'adab', which incorporate the prescribed standards of behaviour, has also a religious sanction behind it from the prophetic tradition. It is related that the Prophet said, 'God has disciplined me, and has perfected my discipline'. The word 'muaddab' is applied to a child who defaecates outside the house at the age of three or four, and goes further and further away from the house as he grows older. After the age of ten, for instance, he is not considered 'muaddab' unless he covers his genitals while urinating. A boy of fourteen to sixteen would be 'muaddab' if he played in the evenings only, and still better, if

1 Use of the guest house is restricted to males.

ADOLESCENCE, SEX AND MARRIAGE

The following table shows the percentages of monogamous and polygamous marriages among the Moslem population in the country as a whole. 595

TABLE V

Percentage of monogamous and polygamous marriages

<i>Number of wives</i>	1927	1937
One wife	95.18	96.86
Two wives	4.49	2.95
Three wives	0.29	0.17
Four wives	0.04	0.02 ¹

What does it feel like to be a newly married bride, confined to her house, with the occasional temptations of stealing a peep through the holes of the door onto the outside world? What is her complex emotion on seeing her husband returning home or while serving him, washing his hands, watching him eat, etc.? Does she fear her first sexual experience? Does her husband show an affection towards the girl in sexual intercourse? Are other erogenous zones used in sex? What are the overtones of small talk, if any, between husband and wife in the midst of the recurrent experiences of sexual intercourse which is one of the great pleasures in such a culture? Such issues are significant to a study of the factors influencing the interaction of culture and personality. The writer cannot claim to give any substantial answer to such questions as the whole issue is taboo and it would be impossible for a person who is normally part of this culture to raise such points without endangering his prestige. [23]

By getting married, the bridegroom and bride have achieved the hallmark of adulthood; and this brings satisfaction to one's parents. The transfer of the wife to the patrilocal residence is usually thought of after she bears a child, and by then her mother prepares for her a special head-cover (tawada) to enable her to go out. The wife's settlement in her husband's house does not end her connection with her family, as it is her father's home which is always opened for her as a safeguard against any maltreatment from her husband or other members of his family.² 885 591 [593]

¹ Pocket Census of 1948, p. 12.

² It is a well-known fact that some married husbands become impotent during their first sexual experiences and are usually then called tied (marbout). In such cases, a religious man would be invited to read for him, or write a charm which he wears under his clothes. Sometimes when this fact is known, a friend of this married man would go and tell him that he has 'tied' him; and for this the friend would invite the husband to a meal of pigeons. [833]

³ When a wife forsakes her husband's home for her father's she is known as 'hardani', and mediators or an Arab council would try to reconcile the two sides. For a similar situation see Hilma Granqvist, *op. cit.*, pp. 225-32. [586]

INDIGENOUS LEARNING AND TEACHING

tutors or in the Kuttab, the most important ^{whether with private} content in learning is the memorizing of the Koran as the basis of all other knowledge. The Kuttab has been, and is still in many remote villages in Aswan, the institution for religious learning, in which children learn part or the whole of the Koran, to be able to use this knowledge for their recitation and prayers, and the observation of correct ritual and prayer. The learning of reading and writing was always secondary to this all-important aim.

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries a great number of Kuttabs were financed by the revenue derived from charitable foundations called 'Wakfs'.¹ It was not until 1906 that these schools felt the impact of the central Government authority. In that year the Kuttab was organized, and a system of inspection and awards was worked out in accordance with which Kuttabs satisfying the official requirements could avail themselves of it. The aid was dependent upon daily instruction in the three R's, together with religious teaching, combined with a report of the Ministry of Education Inspector as to the general conditions of the Kuttab.² Later on, private awards were given to those boys who could satisfy the Inspector in an oral examination that they had learnt all the Koran by heart.

In Silwa and its neighbouring villages, there is only one aided 'Maktab', which is the official name for a recognized Kuttab, besides the other five unrecognized Kuttabs.³ It is significant to note that four out of the six Kuttabs are attached to, or situated very near, a mosque, and the fifth is adjacent, and connected with a clan's guest house. Apart from the obvious connection between the mosque and religious learning in the Kuttab, such a proximity between the Kuttab, the mosque and the clan guest house enables the Kuttab boys to fetch water from the wells of the mosque or the clan guest house to be used for drinking, or for cleaning their wooden tablets. Out of the six Sheikhs running the Kuttabs in Silwa, three are blind. The Kuttab building usually consists of two rooms, with a raised dais in each room for the Sheikh. There is hardly any equipment, except the Sheikh's prayer mat, and the wooden tablets on which the boys write their Koranic assignment. The aided Kuttab is, however, an exception, as it has wooden seats, desks, and a blackboard, and is whitewashed. All the Kuttabs, except the aided one, are confined to boys. Only recently have some girls begun to attend the aided Kuttab, as attendance at it exempts both boys and girls from going to the compulsory school. In fact, throughout the history of Moslem Egypt the keenness on teaching girls the Koran has never been so strong as in the case of boys. MacDonald mentioned, however, that there are records of

¹ J. Hayworth-Dunne, *An Introduction to the History of Education in Modern Egypt*.

² Ministry of Education, *Code of Regulations Relating to Grants-in-Aid to Kuttabs*, No. 1161, May 1906.

³ The Kuttab is usually referred to in Silwa by the name Khalwa—a word which literally means 'an isolated place for worship'.

INDIGENOUS LEARNING AND TEACHING

892 learned women who had finished a Kuttab course and proceeded to a
 294 higher educational course in either al-Azhar or the College Mosques
 [562] (Madrasah); but their numbers were very small in comparison.¹ I was
 told by one of the Kuttab Sheikhs that some of the pious ancestors
 recommended that women should only know a few chapters of the Koran
 to enable them to say their prayers, and also to learn particularly Surat
 al-Nur.² He went on further to say that Imam Malik thought it inadvisable
 to teach reading and writing to girls as well as to the sons of 'tyrants and
 oppressors'.³

The following is an account of how a boy spends his day in the Kuttab.
 The day begins always before sunrise and the first boy who arrives in the
 morning opens the Kuttab door with the key which is usually hidden
 underneath the door or outside the threshold. The Sheikh (always called
 by the boys 'Our Master')⁴ arrives later, usually after sunrise; until his
 arrival, the boys would be busy reciting their assigned portion of the
 Koran which they had written on their wooden tablets the day before.
 On the Sheikh's arrival, older or more advanced boys would one by one
 hand over their tablet to the Sheikh and go on reciting what is written
 on it, and on satisfying the Sheikh as to their proper and accurate
 memorizing, they would be asked to clean their tablets and proceed to
 the next assignment. The same procedure is followed with the younger
 boys. Those who have failed to satisfy the Sheikh by forgetting sentences
 or hesitating in the correct pronunciation would be asked to go on repeat-
 ing their assignment to be heard again by the Sheikh later on. In his work
 in the Kuttab, the Sheikh, especially if he is blind, relies a great deal on
 one or two monitors ('areef).

[178] After proving that they have learnt their assignment, the boys are asked
 to wash their tablets with water, the drops of which must fall into a pot,
 and not be allowed to fall on to the ground as they contain the dissolved
 words of God on which no one should tread, as this is considered to be
 sacrilege (haram). This also applies to the tablet itself when the assignment
 is written on it, and a boy who drops it on the ground has to kiss it in
 respect. After washing the tablet with water, however, thus removing the
 previous writing, a layer of whitish clay is put on it to render the surface
 fit for writing again. The ink is made by the boys themselves, by mixing
 212 fine oven soot with ground roasted nuts of a gum tree together with
 [386] some gum. This mixture is left for some time to brew before it is actually
 used.

¹ D. B. MacDonald, *Aspects of Islam*, pp. 293-4.

² On looking up this Koranic chapter, the writer found that it mainly dealt with pre-ventive measures against fornication and slander, and related the story of 'Ayisha, the Prophet's wife, when she was slandered by enemies, and how God revealed the truth about her chastity.

³ The writer had no opportunity of checking the truth of this statement attributed to Imam Malik.

⁴ The Kuttab Sheikh is usually called by this title, 'Our Master', even by adults, especially the illiterate people—see Taha Hussein, *al-Ayyam* (An Egyptian Childhood).

EDUCATION AND SOCIAL CHANGE

where. In default of compliance or in the case of the continued absence of the child, its parents or guardian are to be notified, and are liable to fine or imprisonment. 812
[55]

These were the main laws governing the compulsory school in Egypt until 1948, and the village school was on a half-day basis up to that year, boys attending school in the morning, followed by the girls in the afternoon.¹ There are usually four classes in the school building and three other rooms, one for the staff and two for stores. The number of school-children during the year 1950-51 was 138 in the four classes. According to the official records the numbers of children of the compulsory school age for the last seven years were: [34]

TABLE VI
Children of the compulsory school age
in Silwa (1944-51)

Year	Total	Boys	Girls
1944	154	77	87
1945	98	50	48
1946	98	45	53
1947	97	48	49
1948	131	60	71
1949	47	26	21
1950	61	38	23
1951	77	51	26 ⁽¹⁰⁾

The school, however, has only places for 150 children of all ages, and thus there is scope for some parents to compete for appeal either to the Omda or the headmaster at the beginning of the year to exempt their children from schooling or to withdraw them on grounds of lack of space.

As to the staff, the school has between three and four teachers; two of them at present are from the village itself, and the teachers are either the products of al-Azhar, the theological University, or the Elementary Training College (four to five years' course). The main requirement for entrance to the latter at the age of fourteen is the memorization of half 895
[874]

¹ It is indicative of the male-female ethos that boys should attend school first, and even at present when the school is full, and the classes are mixed, the boys sit in the front, with the girls at the back of the class. This reflects the different sex norm guiding the behaviour of the villagers in comparison with mixed education in the modern Egyptian Universities where, for instance, girl students sit in the front and the male students sit behind them, yet there is no real mixing in the lecture rooms. The front rows are normally reserved for girls, and the general tendency is for the girls to keep to these rows. [562]

² The number of children eligible for compulsory school in 1949, 1950 and 1951 is comparatively low because of the very high death rate amongst both children and adults between 1941 and 1943 as a result of the malaria epidemic. [165]
[164]

CHAPTER II

THE WOMEN AND CHILDREN

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114 FOREIGNERS are often heard talking about "the poor oppressed Egyptian woman." She is spoken of as over-worked and ill-treated, and her husband as a brute without feeling or thought for her. I would have my readers bear in mind that in this book I am dealing only with the *fellāḥin*; I have no intention of discussing or criticizing the aspirations for emancipation which are now finding voice among many Egyptian ladies of the upper classes. What I have to say here concerns the peasants only, among whom I have sojourned for several years. No one is more anxious than I am to see the status of Egyptian women raised, for until they are made fit to hold a higher position in their world there is, I think, little chance of the country taking a more exalted place among the nations of the earth.

868 The girls' education should be entirely practical to start with,
562 and book-learning should come by slow degrees. They should be

872 taught the best way of carrying out their domestic duties, which are, after all, very simple—how to cook their food in a cleanly way,

863 to realize that hands should be carefully washed before handling food or mixing the flour and kneading the dough for bread, and

1515 that a *clean*, not a *dirty*, dress should be worn when they are engaged in any culinary operation. They should also be made to

252 realize that if they would spend but half an hour to an hour every morning sweeping their mud floors and the ground outside their

352 house-doors, and then burning the refuse, they would have both healthier and brighter homes and villages. At present they are

744 without the most elementary knowledge of hygiene, and are unmethodical in the carrying out of most, if not all, their domestic duties. It is in matters such as these that the village girls need instruction first and foremost.

562 The somewhat inferior position that the peasant women occupy in village society compared with that of the men follows as a natural consequence of their greater ignorance.

2: Blackman E-5 (1920-1926) 1927

MR13 Fellahin MR13

Upper Egypt

THE WOMEN AND CHILDREN

Little girls have a perfectly free life until they reach marriageable age, when their freedom is somewhat more restricted. After marriage they are still more secluded, but the degree of seclusion varies, being rather stricter among the better-class peasants than among those of lower social status. Among the latter there may be considerable freedom of intercourse between the sexes. It must be remembered that there are quite definite social grades among the *fellāḥin*, the lines of demarcation being very strongly em-

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[480]

FIG. 14. A MOTHER WITH HER CHILDREN

phasized. For instance, in a family well known to me the women are not allowed to speak freely to the men, and, with the exception of the elderly mother, none of the females are allowed to enter a room in which male visitors may be seated, and even the mother does not appear unless there is something which renders her presence necessary. One of the women in this family is a widow of about thirty years of age, possibly a little older, and her brother objects to her even being seen walking in the streets of their village, except when she goes, accompanied by her mother, to get the water for household use or for some other necessary purpose. He told me that if he allowed her to be seen walking about in public

[312]

THE FELLAHIN OF UPPER EGYPT

562 places his family would at once lose their position, and they would
 565 be looked down upon as nobodies. To our Western ideas such
 521 restrictions are apt to be regarded as a form of tyranny, but it is
 577 not a fair judgment. Seclusion is partly a sign of respect among
 Egyptians, and indicates the value that the men put upon their
 womenfolk. Most of the women have unfortunately a difficult and
 181 dangerous temperament, which, until they have learnt self-control,
 562 and have been inspired with higher ideals, makes them anything
 152 but an elevating influence in village society.

Though theoretically they are supposed to be entirely in sub-
 562 jection to the male sex, in practice they can, and often do, maintain
 593 a very firm hold on their husbands. I have known many men who
 are in mortal terror of their wives. Indeed, I am often inclined
 to think that it is the poor oppressed Egyptian *man* who has a
 claim to my sympathy, and that the over-ruled, oppressed wife is
 somewhat of a myth.

583 More often than not a man marries a girl from his own village,
 the favourite marriage being with a daughter of his father's
 brother. On the smallest provocation, some imagined slight, for
 593 example, a girl will run off to her father's or brother's house, and
 578 remain there until her husband, from fear of mischief being made
 against him in the village by his wife's relations, is induced to
 agree to do whatever his wife demands of him. She may require
 him to buy her gold earrings, a nose-ring, an anklet, or fine clothes,
 and, though a poor man, he may feel obliged to purchase one or
 more of these articles for fear of what his wife may do. Many
 1902 men have run into debt for such reasons.

586 A man of my acquaintance, who owns a certain amount of land
 428 and is by way of being one of the rather superior people of his
 581 village, divorced his wife a year or two ago. She was quite a decent
 woman, but, her relations being poor, she had no land of her own,
 and, moreover, her husband's brother had died, bequeathing his
 widow a *feddān* (acre) of land and a little money. My acquaintance
 had his eye on this land, which was family property, belonging origin-
 ally to his father, and the only way he could obtain it was by marry-
 ing his brother's widow. He did not want to have two wives, for
 1593 it is expensive to keep up such an establishment; also, monogamy
 is becoming much more common in Egypt, and to have more than
 one wife is looked upon as rather barbarous even among the
 peasants. The only thing to do was to get rid of his first wife.

THE FELLÄHIN OF UPPER EGYPT

152 I fancy that there was really no just cause for the woman's
593 jealous suspicions. However, she has reduced her husband to a state of abject fear lest he may arouse her anger—though I did hear that on one occasion he had plucked up sufficient courage to exercise his 'rights' as a husband, and so had administered a whipping for some fault she had committed!

462 With regard to the division of labour among the sexes, the men
241 certainly have the hardest and largest share, the most strenuous work in the fields being invariably done by them. The women and girls join their menfolk in the cultivation after the sun has risen, but their work is usually confined to the gathering of dry roots, tending the cattle, fetching the water for the household (Fig. 16), and so on. Of course, living is simple among the peasants, so that very strenuous work for the women is not necessary. Much, however, that might be done by them is neglected simply because they are without training in domestic duties and do not realize what important work lies to their hands.

462 It is, of course, very difficult for the peasants to be as clean as
515 they should be. All the water has to be fetched by the women, often from some distance. No water is laid on in the villages, no bathrooms exist, and the houses lack the most ordinary domestic offices. Excuses must, therefore, be made for the Egyptian women, who have had none of the advantages of the poorest woman in England. The instinct of the Egyptian *fellâhin*, however, is to be clean, and the religion of Islâm commands ablutions. A man will almost instinctively strip and bathe if he happens to be near a canal or the river, but this privilege is denied to the women, as modesty forbids their bathing in public.

834 One of the most crying needs in Egypt is that both girls and
854 women should have instruction in the care and upbringing of
562 children. The children undergo a great deal of unnecessary suffering during the early years of their infancy; not because their mothers are lacking in affection, for Egyptian women are, as a rule, devoted mothers, but because they are so hopelessly ignorant.

1164 The results of such ignorance more often than not leave an indelible mark on the child, such as defective eyesight or even absolute blindness. To prevent or cure disease in their children the women will go to one magician after another and purchase from them amulets and written charms, not grudging for a moment the expenditure of what may be to them considerable sums of money.

40 [Text continues on page 42]

THE WOMEN AND CHILDREN

far as I know, from private individuals. It is very different in England, where the hospitals for children and adults alike are supported by voluntary contributions. It is not that charity is lacking in Egypt—far from it; but for *organized* charity such as we have in England there is a crying need.

It is not altogether surprising, considering the state of ignorance in which they exist, that the mental outlook of most of the villagers is low. As far as the women are concerned, there is nothing to raise it. Sexual matters form the chief topic of their conversation, and this has a most degrading effect both on them and on their children, before whom they discuss the most private matters without the slightest reserve. Thus the children from their very early years hear subjects spoken of and joked about in a manner that is most revolting to educated people. What chance have the children in such circumstances of growing up into pure-minded men and women? I am told (for such conversation rarely takes place in my presence) that the women are far greater offenders in this respect than the men, who usually refrain from discussing their wives with outsiders. Whether this is true or not I am not in a position to say, but at any rate the children, and especially the girls, who are more constantly with their mothers than the boys, hear the most private sexual matters openly discussed, and in such a way as to poison their minds at the very outset of their lives. Marriage is, of course, the one and only aim in life among the girls, and the desire to get a husband is encouraged in every way by the mothers. It is quite a pitiful sight to see a little girl decked out in all the jewellery she can muster, dressed in a gaily coloured frock decorated with beads and jangles (Fig. 17), and with a veil drawn coquettishly across her face, standing about the village street, or outside the house, obviously on the look-out to attract some man. In all this they are aided and abetted by their mothers, who regard it as a compliment to themselves as well as to their daughters if the latter are sought after as wives at an early age. The Egyptian Government is endeavouring to prohibit the very early marriages which have been usual in the past, and there is now a law forbidding a girl to marry till she is sixteen and a boy till he is eighteen. However, in small, out-of-the-way villages the law has been disobeyed to my certain knowledge in more than one case. False ages were, I suppose, given to the *kādi*, as the man who draws up the marriage contracts is called; and he, in view of the fee he

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obtains for his business, probably refrained from examining the statement as to age made by the girl's parents.

The childbearing age lasts over a long period, for girls mature

early, and it is a common thing in Egypt for a woman of fifty to give birth to a child. From an economic point of view it is probably an advantage that so many of the children die, for otherwise the country would soon become over-populated. What is so desirable is that those who do survive should be brought up in healthier surroundings, both moral and physical, and without the unnecessary suffering inflicted upon them by the ignorance of the mothers.

In spite of the frequently indecent talk on sexual matters, there is a strict moral code, especially with regard to unmarried girls, the infringement of which often entails a

terrible punishment. This seems somewhat unfair on the girls, considering the atmosphere in which they are brought up. If a girl has miscondacted herself before marriage, and is discovered at marriage to be unchaste, the disgrace to her family is looked upon as such a terrible one that her own parents will often kill her, sometimes taking the unfortunate child—for she is hardly more than a child—into the desert, and there dispatching her, usually, I



FIG. 17. YOUNG GIRL DRESSED UP TO ATTRACT A HUSBAND

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believe, by cutting her throat. Unfaithfulness in a wife may likewise be punished by death, sometimes death by drowning. If her paramour also is caught they may be thrown into the river or a canal together. 684

The moral standard is very much lower in some villages than others, and I have observed that villages of pure, or comparatively pure, Egyptian stock are more moral sexually, more honest, and less prone to crimes of violence than are those of mixed negro or Arab origin. 577
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In any case, it is not fair to judge these peasants too harshly. Much cannot be expected of them in their present condition of ignorance, and I believe that until the women can be depended on to exercise a purer and higher influence on their society there is not much prospect of the moral tone of the village communities being raised. 181
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In later years a woman, especially if she has sons, has an honourable position in the family. A man's love and respect for his mother is a marked characteristic among Egyptians, and even after marriage the mother retains the highest place in her son's love and respect. Some years ago I was told that if a man ill-treated his mother and did not show her the greatest honour and respect the whole village would consider him a reprobate. In the married son's household his mother reigns supreme, and the wife who does not show proper respect to her mother-in-law usually has no chance of finding favour with her husband. As an old friend of mine, a man who had always had the greatest veneration and love for his mother, once said to me, "My wife is good, and I am pleased with her, but she must remain there [pointing downward]. My mother is up there [pointing upward]. Did she not carry me here for nine months [pressing his hands on his stomach]? Did she not endure pain to give me birth, and did she not feed me from her breast? How could I not love her? She is always first and above all with me. My wife may change and may lose her love for me. My mother is always the same; her love for me cannot change." 582
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[554]
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I fear I may seem to have given a very unpleasant impression in many respects of the peasants of Egypt, but I have dwelt on the darker side of the picture at some length not because there is no brighter side, nor because I am lacking in appreciation of the many excellent qualities to be found in most of my village friends. It is 114
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832 a piece of paper lying on the ground under one of the palm-trees. He picked it up and saw that it was a charm of some kind. He cannot read or write, but he can sign his name, and he noticed that his name was written on this charm. One of the Government *employés* who lives near by has a considerable knowledge of such matters, so my servant took the paper to him. The man read it and said that it was a charm written to make my servant love the girl mentioned above. It had been placed high up in the palm-tree, but had not been securely tied to the branch, and so had fallen on to the ground. However, it would not have been effective in any case, as the name of my servant's father was written in it, and not the name of his mother, which must always be inserted in such charms. The man said that it was a charm of terrible potency, and that, but for this slip, due probably to their not knowing the mother's name, it would have been disastrous in its effect! Unfortunately, my servant tore it up before he told me about it. I reproached him for not giving it to me, as he knew I was anxious to collect such things, but he was obviously frightened, and felt that he must destroy it. I may mention that this young man is now safely married to one of his cousins.

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584 As I have stated before, the girls when they have reached marriageable age are more restricted in their freedom. If there is an unmarried cousin, especially one in the paternal line, a girl is usually married to him. When a marriage is contemplated the relatives of the two parties discuss how much money either is prepared to provide. When this has been settled the prospective bridegroom, or rather his father, pays the bride-price agreed upon to the bride's parents. They then repair to the *kādi*, as the village judge is called, and he writes out the agreement between the two parties. The couple are now betrothed, a betrothal, as I have already stated, being almost as binding as a marriage.

585 Among the Muslims there is no religious-ceremony at a wedding, for with them marriage is not regarded as a sacrament; the actual marriage takes place when the bride goes to her husband's house. The bride is usually, so I am told, taken to her husband's house at sunset, but I have often seen her being conveyed thither in the daytime. She is usually taken there on a camel, being seated in a sort of tent-like erection fixed on to the animal's back, and she is accompanied by some of her girl friends. This erection sways from side to side as the camel walks along. Other camels, with

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of Egypt in 1937 there were 7,947,193 men to 7,957,332 women. As nearly everyone marries, the inference is obvious. It may be, too, that Moslem customs have been counteracted to some extent by natural law and by Christian influence as represented in the Coptic family. In any case, years of work and suffering together, children, and a wife's good care create an almost unbreakable bond.

The temperament of the fellaheen, especially of the women, is very ardent and sensual. Marriage is to them less an affair of love than one of sexual attraction and reproduction.

The fellah's wife usually enjoys better health than her husband, who is weakened by bilharzia. She is younger and despite Islam has had considerable freedom in her own affairs since the most ancient times. Village tradition requires on pain of death that she should be physically a virgin when she marries, but mentally she has ceased to be so long before. Since childhood she has been aware of her parents' intercourse, which is quite open owing to lack either of privacy or of modesty. The conversation of the women, even before young girls, turns often on these subjects, not perhaps viciously, but certainly without restraint. They tell each other of the charms and stratagems with which to please and hold their menfolk.

The men, who are more reserved and by their way of life utterly materialistic; understand only sexual love. They revel in it, each with his own wife, and are kept faithful less by virtue than by village law. Adultery leads immediately to bloodshed, and prostitutes are beyond their means.

The heat of passion is short-lived. At thirty a fellah woman is no longer attractive, but the children she has borne her husband bind him to her. Both want children above everything else. To the wife they mean social prestige, for barrenness is a disgrace and the chief cause of polygamy and divorce (**). To the father they represent helpers and successors, who will allow him to rest and give orders. Accordingly families are large. The average number of children is five, and this presupposes eight to ten births. The older they grow the more important does the mother become.

Another thing that binds the man to his wife is her wisdom and authority, which are often greater than his. A fellah proverb has it that 'Man is a river, woman a dyke'.

594 From a fortnight after marriage until her first son is five
462 years old, the wife helps her husband in the fields, especially
in the cotton season; but, unlike the Alawite peasant women
for example, she never tackles heavy work.

462 More often she is busy at home; there is plenty to do,
562 for she mills and bakes, rears and milks the *gamoossa* and the
593 goat, looks after the fowls, prepares manure and fuel, sews,
washes, and delouses herself in public.

She is free to come and go within the limits set by village
tradition. She is not hidden from the menfolk like towns-
women or the women of the middle class. She has to carry
breakfast to her husband out in the fields, then return home
with the *gamoossa's* dung, and fetch water several times a
day. She must go to market to sell eggs, butter and poultry,
and to buy oil and other things. Tradition and necessity
outweigh the severity of the Koran.

The wife retains ownership of the furniture she brought
on her wedding-day, and the money for what she sells. In
this way she can save and even lend to her husband, which
gives her a certain authority. If he maltreats her, she can
go back to her father's house and impose her own conditions
before returning — the gift of a dress, or a pair of ear-rings.
She is less dependent on her husband than he is on her.

593 A year or two ago, when the men were being levied to
181 meet the flood danger, I heard a woman weeping. "Don't
731 take it so much to heart", I said. "They've taken your
231 husband off, but he'll come back."

"It isn't for my husband I'm crying, but for my lost
gamoossa. Find me my *gamoossa*."

562 The *fellâha* retains her liberty and authority as long as
577 she is wise enough not to infringe the traditions; for then
the man gets the upper hand again. She will die rather
than let herself be examined or treated by a doctor. She
may go out and gossip with the other women as much as
she likes, but woe to her if she is found in the company of
a man, or even alone in some unwonted place. If she goes
wrong, her husband accuses her to her family. Then her
684 father, brother, or cousin must kill her. Such *crimes d'hon-*
577 *neur*, being commended though not established by Islam,
are still frequent and are treated with indulgence by the courts.
But the severity of the punishment is out of proportion not
only to the crime, but also to the woman's education.

The following is one of a hundred examples.

Mahmoud Ahmed 'Abdallah was leaving his village⁶⁸⁴ near Nag' Hammadi, one day in March 1937, to go as usual to the fields, when he learnt that his sister, a widow of thirty-five, had been seduced. Hearing this he returned at once to the village and went to his sister's house. Without uttering a word he seized the *fass* he had with him and split open the poor woman's skull. When the crime became known, the Maamûr of the Markaz, the District Judge, and the Inspector of Public Health went together to the spot. The man himself gave the police the weapon he had used to murder his sister, and after confessing his crime, declared that he had wanted to avenge the family honour.⁵⁷⁷

The wife may be the real ruler of the household, but woe⁵⁹³ to any woman who shows a lack of respect for her husband⁵⁶² by walking in front of him on the way to market, or by interrupting him in any way while he is talking or playing with his friends. He never calls her by her own name, but addresses her as: *Ya mara* (Woman!), *Ya bint* (Girl!), [60] or *Ya Umm Ahmad* (Mother of Ahmad! — his son). He shows his supremacy here by treating her scornfully and giving no sign of affection. The older he gets, the more he demands and values this respect.

"My wife has borne me ten children", said a fellah. "Ten children; and not one of them squints or is blind. With them beside me I feel myself honoured and respected. Thanks to their mother, their feet have never wandered along the paths of shame. She wipes their noses and cleans their faces. She teaches them to kiss my hand when I come back from the fields, to rise when I come in, to serve me first, and never to smoke when I am there."

The peasant wife, who may bear children at any time⁸⁴⁴ between the ages of fourteen and forty-five, gives birth in the simplest fashion in the world, sitting, like the women of Pharaonic times. Mishaps are rare.

But the birth is preceded and followed by a thousand⁸⁴³ practices intended to bring the child fullness of health and happiness. The magic rites are far more important than hygienic precautions. The mother is firmly persuaded that whatever she looks at attentively or wishes for ardently while she is with child will have an effect on the baby. So she

871 His methods are by no means arduous. Two or three
794 hours a day, six months a year, and in three years the fellah
children, helped by the stick, will know a good many *surus*
by heart. For his pains the *fiqih* or teacher receives two
loaves of bread, or one piastre, a week for each pupil.

872 Nowadays even the girls must go to school, but their
● 562 turn comes in the afternoon. In the morning they help
their mothers and fetch in the water, trying their best to
[482] balance on their heads the little *ballas* which is given them.
857 When they grow up they will be able to carry seven gallons
of water in this way. They are also made to gather dung,
bird-droppings, and any other refuse which may be useful
in the house or the field. They make fuel cakes (*gilla*) by
[372] taking a little mud, some chopped straw and a quantity of
dung, which they knead into a paste with their hands and
feet, and then take lumps of, to flatten into cakes about eight
inches across. These are spread out on the ground to dry in
the sun, or stuck on the wall. When thoroughly dry they
are piled up on the roof. These dung-cakes are the fellah's
coal; they are an essentially agricultural form of fuel, used
wherever wood and money are lacking, for example in China
and in several parts of France.

524 The girls have rag dolls to play with, but more often,
857 up to the age of about twelve, they join with the boys in
both work and play. Occasionally, from the age of eight
[464] until they get married, they go into service in middle-class
homes.

857 These children are ignorant and to all appearance neg-
593 lected. They live in a herd and seem to have no patronymics.
But it would be wrong to infer from this that they are of no
concern to their parents, and belong to the community at
large. On the contrary their parents love them passionately,
far more than they, love each other. Children are never put
[736] up for sale here as they are in China, and there is no need for
orphanages. Parental sensitiveness is a frequent cause of
quarrels among both men and women. If a teacher hits or
861 ill-treats their child they are up in arms immediately to
871 remove him from school and take a brutal vengeance. This
does not, however, stop them from using blows and insults
to 'educate' their children themselves.

593 The children are also very much attached to both
their parents. This attachment seems to be rooted in their

183 The women are more intelligent than the men. Sir
 184 William Wilcocks, whose great achievements in irrigation
 by no means prevented him from studying the fellahen,
 explains the difference thus: — "A bad government, if pas-
 sively accepted by men, who are naturally active, will sooner
 or later demoralise them. The same government, if pas-
 sively submitted to by women, who are naturally passive,
 tends on the contrary to develop their intelligence. That is
 why the fellah women are not only more intelligent, but more
 trustworthy than the men ("")."

This opinion is open to discussion. The fact it seeks
 to explain — the traditional feminism of Egypt — is quite
 clear.

181 The fellah's wife is also more cunning than her husband,
 183 which is saying a good deal. Like all weak people the fellah
 practises cunning to the point of duplicity. He knows how
 562 to conceal his joy, his suffering or his crime. His inexpress-
 sive features are a great help. In his shifts and dodges —
 when he leaves it to time to decide, when he agrees without
 any intention of keeping his word, when he uses evasive
 language or purposely misunderstands — he shows an
 adaptability which is indeed a kind of intelligence, but
 intelligence at the level of instinct.

181 The fellah seems lacking in logic. In reality his ideas
 run parallel, and he judges by his own standards. Ask a
 [823] fellah how far it is to a certain village, and he will reply
 "A piastre bus-ride".

181 The *omda* understands this mentality perfectly. "Go
 565 to your father, my lad, and tell him that the Bey (his credi-
 tor) is waiting here for him. If your father isn't there,
 tell him to come all the same, for the Bey knows that he is
 there." And the father, his bluff called in advance, comes
 along without any trouble at all.

181 The truth is that the fellah does not think outside the
 immediate present; he is fettered to the actual moment. No
 time and place except the present have much effect on his
 mind, because they have none on his senses. He is like a
 primitive man or a child; his intellect is controlled by his
 senses, and remains close to things felt and done. The
 fellah looks for causes and effects in the field not of reason,
 sight. Life to him is a succession but of todays. That
 is why he seems illogical.

Because the fellah lives entirely in the present, he is ¹⁸¹neither hurried, nor curious, nor ambitious. He is mild and ¹⁸³peaceable because he is patient, and patient because he is subject to men and events, and for these very reasons he is, like the Nile, indifferent rather than idle. He feels no need for constant activity. His mind is passive and fatalistic; he takes things as they come.

At times, however, some fact breaks suddenly through ¹⁸¹the confused atmosphere of his mind, through this mist ¹⁵²that protects him from excess of knowledge or action — as ⁵⁷⁷from suicide — and goads him into activity. Then he reacts ⁵⁷⁸on the impulse of the moment, without discrimination or sense of proportion, without reckoning the importance of what has happened or thinking of the consequences of what he is doing. His neighbour pinches some of his harvest, ^[685]a duck, or a fowl. Someone diverts his irrigation water or lets a *gamoossa* loose on his grazing. His son is bullied by another boy or his wife insulted by some other woman. A ^[683]friend delays too long in returning a few borrowed piastres, ⁴²⁶or looks too long at his wife. Someone brings a complaint or accusation against him. Then the same fellah who is so patient under the injustice or cruelty of his superiors shows himself to his equals as touchy as can be. The occurrence may be of little or no importance, but it seems to him intolerable and stings him to revenge. He reacts violently, and infects others with the same passion as himself. Human life counts for nothing.

In Upper Egypt, when a man quarrels with another he ⁵⁷⁹will try to attack him on the spot with any weapon he can ¹⁸¹lay his hands on. The fellah of the Sa'id is like a volcano ⁵⁷⁸which will erupt when least expected.

More usually the revenge is cunningly dissembled, and carried out by night with endless precautions. The enemy will be set upon from behind, in the maize fields; or if the man himself is not attacked his crop will be burnt, his *gamoossa* poisoned, or his corn scattered over the neighbouring fields.

Though the fellah will put up with a multitude of wrongs ¹⁸¹from his masters when at work, he is not afraid to stand up ¹⁸³to them if the dispute is about women, for women and land ⁵⁷⁸are the points on which he is most susceptible. Then there ⁵⁶²

181 is no question of strong and weak, rich and poor. Authority
 183 and wealth count for nothing. Landowners know this,
 578 and cannot take their pleasure of the village women.
 562 More than one Bey has been murdered at his own door for
 seducing a village girl.

682 Murder and revenge among the fellaheen arise more
 181 often from quick temper than from ill will ; they are signs
 152 of hot blood. But such outbursts do not last long, and
 resignation, being more habitual, is a far more noticeable
 characteristic.

[539] The following fellah proverbs are significant :

Patience moves mountains.

Patience costs nothing.

The patient man sees free.

773 'When God created all things', says Ka'b el Ahbar,
 according to Maqrizi, 'He gave each of them a companion.
 "I am going to Syria", said Reason. "I will come with
 you", said Rebellion. Poverty said "I am going to the
 Desert". "I'll come with you", said Health. "I am going
 to Egypt", said Plenty. "And I'll go at your side", said
 Resignation.'

181 Resignation is a word scarcely strong enough to describe
 163 the servility and degradation which is imposed upon the
 fellaheen not so much by their poverty as by the unceasing
 pressure of their masters. The fellah acts like a child or a
 brute because he is treated like one. He knows nothing of
 the upper class which rules him except its hard exterior.
 It is often said that the fellaheen cannot understand an
 authority that is humane and appeals to their better instincts.
 This is true, but the reason is that they have been brought
 [681] up to nothing but blows, fines, insults, and bullying,
 which have finally rendered them insensible.

I myself, before I understood the meaning of human
 dignity, used the same harshness towards them, so natural
 and inevitable did it seem.

That the fellah's sense of justice is corrupt, that he lacks
 frankness, confidence, and eagerness is true, but this is
 because no-one has done anything to teach him these quali-
 ties or to give him any moral encouragement.

It is also true that his work is done without pleasure,
 without devotion and without style, that he has no taste
 for doing a job well, that he lacks initiative and inventive-

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the *Kūdiya* demands anything, can she contradict her, lest the Grand *Shaiḥ*, under whose jurisdiction the demons [or '*Afrīt*'] are, may be angry. And so the woman comes to her husband with bashfulness or with abuse, and if she is able to wheedle anything from him she does so. If not, she must sell something of her own property, and put a stop to the demands of the *Kūdiya*, somehow or other. If she should demand of one of them the performance of the *Zār*, the expenditure will not fall short of twenty or thirty guineas, not to mention trinkets, ornaments, and valuable garments which the *Kūdiya* asks from her, with the statement that the '*Afrīt* [or demon] has come to her in a vision and demanded of her such and such. So the woman is compelled to yield to the demand for fear that he will cross her and cast her into sickness."

"Now I shall explain to my gentle readers what I have actually seen myself [p. 74]. On one occasion one of my lady friends invited me to visit her on a particular day because she would perform the *Zār*, and I was most anxious to witness it. I had never seen it, though I had heard about it. When I entered the place I found a wide court spread with a large carpet, and along its sides rugs thrown upon the ground, so that no part was above the other. This was out of respect for the *Kūdiyāt*, who do not like to sit on couches, nor may anyone sit above them. This is done out of obedience to "Religion," seeing that their belief is that what they do is in accordance with the text of the Divine Law, which just shows the ignorance of these women and their not studying the facts, for they know nothing of their Religion except the names of Saints like *Bedawī*, *Rifā'ī*, *Bayūmī*, *Mutawellī*, and other such names.¹ So if one of them has the least ailment, the *Kūdiya* makes her imagine that *Sidī Bedawī* or some other will come to her. And everyone knows how much the imagination influences the feelings. So the women seek "blessing" from her, and come to her from all sides, reckoning the honouring of her one of the chief requirements of religion, because there dwells in her body the pure *Sidī Bedawī*, or *Shaiḥ Muḥammad*, or

¹ [*Bedawī* is the celebrated saint of Tanṭā, in the Delta; *Rifā'ī* is buried in Cairo near the Citadel. *Bayūmī* is buried at Huseiniya near 'Abbāsiya, Cairo; *Mutawellī* is the famous *Kuṭb* (or "Pole") of the *Sūfīs* and is supposed to manifest his presence behind the *Bāb al-Zuwayla* in Cairo. Tr.]

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153 But these influences are the result of fear and perhaps they
 152 cause other diseases of a nervous character which are feared
 861 especially by the young. And since that is only the result of
 frightening children with the dark, and with Jinn and the bogey
 man¹ and other [p. 83] absurdities such as ignorant mothers
 tell to their children, frightening and terrifying them, the cure
 for the resultant ills is to eradicate the ignorance of the mothers
 [56] by education, a thing which is still considered a sin in the
 East.

XL

INCENSING (TABKHĪRA)

157 "AND for Syphilis (*taḥwīḥ*) they 'prescribed' incensing,
 Which an "old wife" among them of the tribe of Basūs
 prepares.

She recites over it the [Koranic] section of *Iblīs* [=the Devil]

As if Death sent her to go to and fro.

How much money was given for its fabrication?

How many souls have been disgusted by its fumigation?

And does their 'incensing' with vermilion (*zungafr*)

Cure a sick person, when there is decay in the skeleton?"

Some of the "old wives" in the provinces were famed in
 past ages for their "cure" of venereal disease by "incensing."
 It is an ancient practice in the villages until to-day it has
 attained to such a degree of imagination that the villagers apply
 the censer (*mabkhara*) to every serious disease, be it V.D. or not.

I witnessed that myself once. An "old wife" came to
 "incense" a man who had been sick for a long time, and his
 relatives were bewildered about his disease (because they would
 not go to a physician) and in fact, he was suffering from
 [164] retention of urine due to stone. The patient died with the
 assistance of the "incensing" of the "doctress."

¹ [Literally, the man with (or the father of) the skinned leg (*Abū riḡl mas-lūkhā*). This bogey corresponds to our Devil on Two Sticks (= Diable Boiteux = Asmodeus, Prince of Demons). See my article in *Folk-Lore*, vol. xxxviii, 4 (Dec., 1927), p. 377. Tr.]

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Zar in Egypt.

Kawthar Abdel-Rasoul

There is a certain ceremony called Zar among the realm of superstitious beliefs in Egypt. This belief is firstly widely disputed among the Egyptians themselves being mainly opposed by men and taking the bulk of its adherents from the masses of women, especially the uneducated ones in the country and the artisans' wives in the towns. We can say that it is certainly not nation wide, but more or less a feminine practice.

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Briefly summarizing the whole idea, we can say that it is a belief in some spirits who, due to what we cannot say, secretly enter the body of the victim, establish themselves there and cannot be got rid of. The Zar ceremony is performed on those people with the purpose of soothing the spirits and persuading them not to do any harm to the possessed person.

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In this paper we shall try to give a short account of the Zar-ceremony and conclude by comparing it with similar practices in the Sudan and Abyssinia.

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The Elements of the Zar.755
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1. The Patient:

The possessed person is in most cases a woman and only rarely a man. This rule is also applicable in the Sudan and Abyssinia. The patients can be classified as follows:

- (a) Women who are physically or mentally ill and have no hope to be cured by doctors or psychiatrists. As a last resource they turn to the Zar. Such a woman believes a priori that she is possessed by a spirit causing her disease and therefore nothing but the Zar can cure her of it.
- (b) Women who give birth to a deformed child or whose babies are stillborn. The Zar-ceremony is performed on them in order to stop the spirits from doing any more harm to her babies.

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drums and the cries uttered can be applied also in describing a war, or another Central-African dance.

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The Kūdiya is a real medicine man who is an incarnation of the spirits. The sacrifices, the smearing of the body with blood, the collecting of the bones of the sacrificed animal, the burying it in the soil or throwing it in the river etc. . . are all elements of the art practiced by any African tribe. In other words, this article could have been called: "An African Element in Egypt."

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The twofold and complicated Zar-conception of Egypt is due to the Egyptian cultural type. Every belief of supernatural nature was combined in the Zar, even Islamic saints were added to the list of spirits and some Quoranic words are recited.

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An important factor which is responsible for the survival of such an interesting practice is that it offers an opportunity for women gathering and dancing, for buying clothes and jewelry, and satisfying some sexual urge.

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Zusammenfassung.

Im heutigen Aegypten sowie in Abessinien und im Sudan spielt der Glaube an böse Geister eine bedeutende Rolle, namentlich unter den Frauen niederen Standes. Die Geister gehen in die Körper ihrer Opfer ein und nehmen sie in Besitz. Nur durch die komplizierte Zar-Zeremonie können sie besänftigt werden. Die im Zar mitwirkenden Personen und ihre Funktionen werden eingehend geschildert: die Zentralgestalt Kudiya (meist eine Frau, nur selten ein Mann), einige Assistenten und Musiker und schliesslich die Geister selbst. Die Untersuchung enthält auch eine Reihe von Hinweisen auf Altägypten.

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gather his friends around him for a social meeting in the evening. The light of the moon and stars suffices, or if in winter they must retreat into the dark chamber, the weak glimmer of an oil-lamp. In this country nothing is known of nocturnal labours either of hand or head even among the learned, and the many blind and blear-eyed people that here wander about have not contracted their ailments through overstraining their eyes. As to-day is, so is to-morrow, and the most momentous events passing in the great world here make on most people no impression whatever. For it is only a very few that receive a newspaper, and still fewer understand it, partly because its language is too fine, and therefore not suited to the mass, partly because the necessary previous knowledge of every kind is absent. Among the ancient Egyptians the common people, such as artisans, were forbidden under severe penalties to mingle in politics. It is only the most urgent necessity that causes the citizen to take a journey, and when he does travel he makes a pilgrimage to Meccah, or, at most, goes to some other country in which Islam prevails. For in the land of the Franks something would every instant come into collision with his ideas and customs; he would have to eat, if not swine's flesh, yet dishes in which swine's fat forms an ingredient; he would have to eat carrion (that is, the flesh of animals strangled, and not slaughtered with an invocation to God); he would not have the proper conditions for the performance of his religious duties, such as his ablutions and prayer five times a day, nor any mosque or muezzin. If he ever happens to have been in Europe, or even in a town in which the Frankish mode of life prevails, he never ceases to tell his countrymen of the ridiculous and preposterous things he saw there, of course not without admitting that there was much good also, especially if there be a Frank among his audience. The ancient Egyptians had a still stronger prejudice and fanaticism against foreign people and foreign things.

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Though the members of the opposite sex certainly do not

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512 groan and languish under the burden of their daily labours,
• 562 yet they do not, as the common descriptions of harem life lead us to believe, recline the live-long day on the soft divan enjoying the *dolce far niente*, adorned with gold and jewels, smoking, and supporting upon the yielding pillow those arms that indolence makes so plump, while the eunuchs and female slaves stand before them watching their every sign, and anxious to spare them the slightest movement. Such slothful dames may indeed be found here and there in the harems of the great, but are not confined to this country. People fall again and again into the mistake of comparing the life of the women of our middle ranks with that of those that occupy the harems of the great! The care of house and family lies much more heavily upon the women here, and there is enough to attend to even if, being assisted by female slaves, as is the case in the higher ranks, they have not to put to their hands themselves, and confine themselves only to giving orders. Cooking, baking, sewing, embroidering, washing, and scouring must be carried on, and children must be attended to here as well as elsewhere—there is no reading nor pianoforte playing, however.

[513] Before sunrise women and children are already awake and moving, many indeed under cover of the dark gray dawn proceed to the river to bathe and wash themselves. The toilette, 515 however, is not usually the first thing that demands attention; [512] the kitchen must first be attended to in order to let the husband away to his occupation. A complete toilette including combing and plaiting of the hair is not in many cases indulged in every day even among ladies of the better class. In this way time and trouble are spared, but a certain class of vermin are left almost unmolested, and establish themselves often so firmly among the black locks of the Eastern beauties that they cannot be extirpated notwithstanding the raids that are made upon them from time to time—even with the application of gray mercurial ointment. As a rule the toilette is associated with a bath, to which praiseworthy enjoyment high and [368] low are attached, whether it be taken in the public bathing establishment, in the river, the sea, or at home by means of

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a shallow tub, and by pouring warm water over the body and scrubbing it with soap and date bast. In the public baths certain hours or days are set apart for the fair sex, and here many women spend half days bathing, adorning themselves, smoking, and gossiping. At these times no male, not even a eunuch would dare to set foot in the apartments.

In other respects also the women are by no means robbed of social pleasures. They visit each other often enough, if possible early in the morning, and are wont to remain half a day, a whole day, or even several days, though both parties may be in the same town. They smoke, drink coffee (the latter being less in use among the women than among the men—the opposite to what holds good among the Franks), gossip, show their ornaments and finery, tell stories and wonderful tales, sew, embroider (but do not knit), sing and dance, or better, make some one sing and dance before them (since a well-conducted lady ought neither to be seen nor heard, and therefore should not sing), laugh and make merry—in short the harem so greatly pitied elsewhere enjoy life, but on the sole condition, that no man be present! They are less often allowed to take a walk in the open air; some—and this is considered a great virtue—never leave the house after their marriage. Their lady friends come to visit them instead, and as almost every house in these regions has its court-yard or a terrace, women are by no means kept out of the open air. Moslim women are generally excused from the burdensome prayers of the men, and pious or even hypocritical women are in the Moslim female world a great rarity; indeed they scarcely know the most important doctrines of their religion. Piety in them is even looked upon with dislike.

At mid-day the husband always eats alone, or with his boys or guests. Immediately afterwards, however, the wife again comes into honour since her lord likes to enjoy his siesta in the chambers of the harem. After sunset no respectable woman must show herself outside the house, even though veiled and attended, and now, or some hours later, the husband

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again repairs to the sacred apartments of those denied to all but himself.

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In the feeling of the Moslim the harems are not citadels of jealousy, in which the husband keeps penned up a considerable flock of luxurious indolent beauties. This representation, so current in the land of the Franks, is spurned by the Oriental with indignation. The women's apartments are rather places sacred and inviolable, where the *harim* (singular *hurm*; *harem* is meaningless), that is "the prohibited," the women, the family, and therefore the husband's dearest treasure must be guarded from profane glances and frivolous influences. As above remarked, they are by no means im-

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prisoned, with the exception perhaps of the women of the highest ranks, they are merely kept and brought up, so that

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they may shut themselves off by their veils both in the home and outside from all strange men; among themselves they enjoy the freest intercourse. Such a harem existed already

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among the ancient Greeks under the less hostilely regarded name of *gynaikion*, and even yet the Greek women are not completely emancipated, and are very strictly looked after. Besides, the native Christian women, at least in Upper Egypt, are even more than those of the Moslim "prohibited." Among the ancient Egyptians, however, they were very free, and went unveiled. In consequence of being thus shut up

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the oriental women have almost come to form a separate caste, whose laws the men have to respect. This caste has its

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female sheikhs, for which dignity the midwives and bathing women in particular are selected, has its medical art, its songs and music, its fashions, almost its own language indeed.

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at least so far as expressions are concerned, and unlimited rule over the little children belonging to it. From the round of its meetings even the master of the house is inexorably excluded. Of course, according to the law, the woman is the

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servant of the man; she has not the right to sit at a common table with her husband; on the street he shyly avoids his veiled spouse; she is even treated by religion as an object of pollution, contact with which demands a full bath before the believer can again perform his devotions; and when men-

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tion is made of her it is usually accompanied, as in the case of other unclean things, with a "saving your presence" (*esmuk Allah*, literally "God honour you"); with regard to inheritance she is regarded as only a half person; she is generally excluded from the mosque, and as a rule is not required to pray, or to know more than is necessary for housekeeping. Still, in the lands of Islam, as well as in the rest of the world, the weaker sex has subjected the stronger in certain fields. Here, too, there are plenty of men who are under petticoat government. The wife is significantly called *sitt*, that is, "mistress," and even the husband calls her so. The wife has even duties to perform towards the outer world in so far as she has to manage the housekeeping. When, in the absence of her husband a guest has to be entertained, meals are served up in the name of the wife through her servants or children, she inquires after the name and health of the guest, but she herself does not appear.

Her sphere of activity is entirely limited to the house, and she fulfils her mission with all the more contentment that the pleasures of the great world are unknown to her. She is not unsusceptible to the attractions of dress and finery—her sex makes this a matter of course—but she has only her husband and her female friends to shine before, and that sets a natural limit to her desires. Her longings do not go beyond her state of half freedom, to which she is accustomed from her youth up, seclusion is not regarded by her as a restraint imposed by the tyrannical men, but as a precept of morality, and a sudden edict of emancipation would at once arouse in the harem itself as much indignation and resistance as a tightening of the reins among the ladies of civilization. It is not to be denied that only in the garden of freedom can a healthy plant thrive, and come to maturity and produce fruit a thousand fold. The greenhouse plant never feels the storm, but it remains weakly and droops at the slightest breath of unaccustomed air that gains entrance from the outside by some crevice. Yet experience teaches that a goodly number of those open-air garden plants cannot stand their freedom, and perish if they do not receive strict attention and care.

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785 allow an eye-lotion to be dropped upon his sore eyes, and the
796 doctor may as well desist at once from attempting a regular
treatment during this month. Anointing the head, bathing,
783 cleaning out the ears, and even looking into a mirror, are
785 also considered sinful by some. It need scarcely be men-
796 tioned that matrimonial duties, were it even a kiss, are ex-
cluded from the labours of the day. Perjury, stealing, and
lying are trifles compared with the deadly sin of cooling the
 parched tongue with a single drop of water during a day in
Ramadan. Ramadan is the touch-stone of the true Moslim,
and there are very few who openly at least venture to break
the fast. Even the women, who know nothing more of their
religion than the words Mohammed, paradise, hell-fire, and
unbelievers, fast likewise (though not in all places); if their
meneses intervene, however, they become unclean, and fasting
then becomes sinful. A person who is sick and travelling
does not require to fast, and can make up for lost time on
another occasion.

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785 The nearer evening approaches the more does the traffic
796 on the street increase. It is comical to see the eagerness
with which the faster awaits the minute that allows him
again the wished-for refreshment. One man, for instance, may
be seen standing with a live coal held above the newly-filled
bowl of his pipe, another holds a piece of date-bread or a cup
of coffee an inch from his mouth. The cannon roars, and the
[202] dainty is at once bolted. As the thunder of the cannon clears
off the clouds from the face of the sky, so does it cheer up
the gloomy, lenten-visages of the sons of Islam. The streets
again become empty, since at home there is already an abun-
796 dant repast prepared; of fat mutton, and many other varieties
264 of dishes, of spices, and sweets of all kinds, there is abun-
dant at the tables of the rich; while the man of the lower
classes, who can seldom afford to buy meat at other seasons
of the year, has been saving up for months in order to give
himself the gratification of a good evening "breakfast" dur-
[504] ing Ramadan. It is a good custom among the rich to have a
[735] guest at this meal, and one is often taken in off the street.
Nor does the poor beggar at this time go empty away.

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than the Friday's ceremony. This day's breakfast² the first for a month, consists, if possible, of fresh or salted fish, with all kinds of fruits and delicacies, in order that the body may be gradually accustomed to its usual course of life. People appear in their holiday clothes, and the shops are shut. On this day shirts covered with a year's dirt are exchanged for brand-new garments even among the poorest, gay silken stuffs infold those parts and members of the body that were previously exposed, costly cloths flutter round the head, and the cheerful colours of the bright red, bright yellow, green, and blue coats show vividly in the morning sun. The little girls, who are allowed to run about the streets and markets only on rare occasions, on this day flutter about like brilliant butterflies through the whole town, in their fire-red clothes, their faces carefully painted and touched up, and their persons hung with ornaments of gold and silver. A nameless joy beams in and from out the heart of everybody. No longer is there any enemy, any hateful unbeliever; high and low are all one, the whole citizens embrace each other—liberty, equality, fraternity. A round of visits is made from house to house; officials and people of the higher ranks give a very imposing reception, and everybody wishes everybody else a happy new year, though the new year will not come for three months yet. After the visitor has embraced his host round the neck, bending over his right and his left shoulder, coffee, and sherbet are brought, or the half-fermented native beer made from barley, and called *buza*. Everybody serving another in any capacity on this day receives from his master a money present or at least a new garment. The women also adorn themselves and hold receptions for each other, but this is done to a greater extent on the following day, as they have too much to do on the first day in preparing liquors for the male guests. Any other kind of work is out of the question. The remaining portion of such holidays passes quietly, the chief times of the day being proclaimed by the reports of a cannon as well as by the muezzin. As early, however, as the second day of the feast some persons who are eager after business open their shops and buy and sell;

2 [i.e., following the fast of Ramadan—analysis]

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ing, a long row of straw mats and carpets is laid, on which sit many men silently smoking their chibooks. Some men and boys, connections of the departed, run to and fro on the street uttering cries of grief and covering their faces with their hands. "Oh, my father," they cry (or "mother," "brother," &c., as the case may be), "Oh, my sorrow, my death; oh, despair; oh, my strength; oh, camel of my house"

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(camel as a symbol of strength or support). Friends show their sympathy and attempt to give consolation, but even men,

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at other times so undemonstrative, weep loudly and give themselves up to grief. What, then, is to be expected of the women, with their more easily excited feelings? They put on the dirtiest dark-blue dresses they can find, loosen their hair, and display their breasts, smear these and their faces with filth, pluck out their hair and tear their own flesh in a frenzy of grief. All order ceases, the loud outcry is raised again and again by the mourning-women hired for the purpose, and those who come to give consolation and show their sympathy go beyond the real mourners and join the hundred-voiced chorus. It was customary among the ancient Egyptians,

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and also among the Jews, to indulge in these loud lamentations, to smear themselves with filth, and to hire mourning-women. The Prophet strictly forbade it, but the Egyptian women will not let themselves be deprived of these ancestral methods of expressing their grief.

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Scarcely have the eyes of the beloved dead been closed and his head turned towards Meccah, when preparations are begun for getting the corpse out of the house. The ancient Egyptians, on the other hand, retained the body at least seventy days in the house for the purpose of embalming it, before it was placed in the tomb. All the former repose and dignity of the Oriental are now gone; beside the dead body are found only loud despair and headlong haste. The doctor

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or corpse-inspector is first sent for before waiting for the first traces of the phenomena of death, and he must give permission for the burial of the body while it is yet warm. Other messengers have already purchased the linen for the shroud, while outside, the grave-digger is already preparing the last